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The Shame of Compromise? The Politics of Education and the Education of Politics

1 Introduction

Let us begin with a compromise about compromise: regardless of the different and sometimes blatantly contradictory opinions about this topic, we can all agree that the very fact of paying so much attention to it signals a worrisome state of emergency, as proven by the literature on compromise that has practically exploded during the past decade. What Machiavelli used to say about consumption in order to illustrate the need for anticipating crises might apply to the refusal to compromise as well: "[A]t the beginning of the illness, it is easy to treat but difficult to diagnose but, if it has not been diagnosed and treated at an early stage, as time passes it becomes easy to diagnose but difficult to treat" (Machiavelli 2007: 11). If so, we have to try harder to understand what is at stake before the generalization of the refusal to compromise becomes impossible to address.

The title of this chapter suggests a very ambitious project, namely, to explore the connection between compromise, shame, the education of the self, *and* the proper education of politics, for I argue that they are all interrelated. I shall defend my choice with another quote from Machiavelli's *Prince*: I will proceed "as skillful archers do, when their target seems too distant: knowing well the poser of their bow, they aim at a much higher point, not to hit it with the arrow, but by aiming there to be able to strike their target" (Machiavelli 2007: 19).

I will begin by clarifying the connection between compromise and shame. Both terms have suffered drastic reconsideration lately, both can be used either with positive or negative connotations, and both are somehow related to the representation of the self. Inherently, both influence the understanding of political representation in a world transformed by the digital revolution. Thus, in the second part of the chapter I analyze the forgotten dialectic of the self and the development of identity politics. Last but not least, I propose to use precisely the weak spots of the self transformed by the digital revolution in order to address some of the new challenges we have to face both individually and collectively.

2 The Compromise-Shame Connection

In recent years, both compromise and shame have been subjected to a radical reconsideration, resulting in significant changes in their theoretical apprehensions and practical usages. And, as we have witnessed time and time again, metamorphoses in the meanings and the usages of a word signal deeper changes in the *Weltanschauung* that are either prompted or amplified by other significant historical developments (Skinner 1998). The wake-up call to pay closer attention to the deeper transformations is even louder when this process manifests almost simultaneously on two related words – 'compromise' and 'shame'.

As I have argued elsewhere (Fumurescu 2013), historically speaking, the first split in the meaning of compromise happened in Europe at the beginning of modernity – the end of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth. This early modernity was to a large extent prompted by the second revolution in information – namely, the spread of the printing press – which led to "the democratization of knowledge." Following in the footsteps of Great Britain, 'compromise' began its history in the New World by being largely praised and actively cultivated as a political virtue during the entire American Founding and beyond (Fumurescu 2019). It was presented *and* perceived as a willingness to sacrifice one's personal or group interests for the sake of a greater, common good – and from this perspective it suited the so-called republican approach well. Yet, it was also appealing to the more recent classic liberal approach, as a tradeoff of various group interests. The former apprehends the people as an organic corporation that amounts to more than the sum of its parts, led by reason, while for the latter, the people is a voluntary collection of equal individuals, controlled by a numerical majority of wills. Inspired by the old metaphor of the king's two bodies, I have labeled the combination of the two understandings "the people's two bodies." Simply put, compromise supported what I have called "the foundational double helix of the United States." It was a win-win, and the Americans love the idea of having the cake and eating it as well.

Recently, however, "compromise" has come to be used to brand one's opponents as weak, unprincipled, spineless, and willing to sell themselves out, much in line with its general usage in French since the end of the sixteenth century (Fumurescu 2013: 139). The time when a politician like Henry Clay could embrace as a badge of honor the nickname of *The Great Compromiser* or proudly present the Constitution as "the greatest of all compromises" is gone. The fear of *being* compromised now takes center stage, and compromise has become "a dirty word." Discussing the changes in mentalities and practices he has seen in his forty years in the Senate, Orrin Hatch observed in 2018: "Compromise, once the guiding credo of this great institution, is now synonymous with surrender"

(Wolak 2020: 3). In America, nowadays, it is a shame for both politicians and the general population to appear willing to compromise, let alone be labelled as a compromiser. And Europe is not very far behind in this regard. Otherwise, Germany's former Chancellor, Angela Merkel, would not have encouraged students at the Leipzig Graduate School of Management, as she received an honorary doctorate in August 2019: "Do not despise compromise!" (Merkel 2019). This is a world-wide development, one that suggests a world-wide problem.

What could have possibly happened across the whole world? A third revolution in information has occurred, the digital one, prompted by the explosion of internet access, social media, and, recently, Artificial Intelligence. It is a development that worries many, but let us not forget the lessons of the past. The first revolution – the invention of writing – worried Plato's Socrates so much in *Phaedrus* that it was criticized in writing, even if under the guise of a dialogue. Wherever there is a challenge there is also an opportunity, providing that we find ways of putting it to good use.

Yet if practically all across the world it has become a shame to compromise, what about shame itself? Its understanding has also suffered from a mutation in recent years, both in its general and in its political usage. In 1947, Ruth Benedict published her seminal book, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, in which she distinguished between traditional cultures "of shame," such as the Japanese one, and modern ones "of guilt," such as the American one (Benedict 2005). Largely discredited nowadays, Benedict's thesis became the new orthodoxy for most of the twentieth century. Shame, went the argument, impairs the whole self, generating a feeling of worthlessness. "I feel ashamed for *being* this or that." Thus, shaming would be employed by majorities to abusively control minorities' behaviors. Guilt, on the other hand, involves just "a self-critical reaction to certain actions: I feel guilty for *having done* this or that" (Stearns 2016: 199).

For decades after that, with very few exceptions, shame was criticized as a weapon of an intolerant society, deployed to ostracize otherness, amounting to nothing less than an assault on human dignity. In most academic circles, at least, it was considered an "ugly emotion" (Tangney 1991: 598–607). "In contemporary democratic societies shame is often construed as one of the negative emotions that we need to avoid in our deliberations, institutions, and practices [. . .]. Gays and lesbians, women, the disabled, and members of different races have all been shamed and stigmatized" (Tarnopolsky 2010: 1). As a result, it was claimed that "much modern sensibility feels that it is a shame that shame exists" (Hollander 2003: 1068). Jill Locke, for example, praises what she labels "unashamed citizenship" as "the work of courageous and unapologetic people" who "interrogate and denaturalize the terms of shame and shaming, [. . .] claim space for themselves in the world *by whatever means available*, and fight for a reconstituted social order

that gives *real* meaning to democratic commitments" (Locke 2016: 11–12, emphasis added). According to this interpretation at least, it seems that a *real* democratic society must be a shameless one as well.

Since shame presupposes a vertical dimension – one *fails* to reach some ethical high ground, or one *falls* from it – it is to be considered implicitly anti-democratic. Its inherent anti-egalitarian remnants are to be eradicated. To be un-ashamed is to be truly democratic, fighting the systemic inequality promoted by shame culture. "Democratic citizens [. . .] orient themselves in the world in direct opposition to what they perceive to be the requirements of shame. [. . .] We can still say *with confidence* that part of the power of the democratic commitment to popular rule is the turn away from aristocratic deference to claims of religion, identity, and traditions" (Locke 2016: 10, emphasis added).

Is shaming, then, an outdated practice of which one should be ashamed? Not anymore, or, at any rate, the claim is not made as forcefully as before, since, by and large, the tables have turned. The ethical high grounds have changed hands. Among the "means available" for reforming society, shaming has become the "weapon of choice of the weak" (Scott 1985)[1] against the powers-that-be and the status quo. Thanks primarily to new media, it is done free of charge and extremely efficiently in the form of the so-called cancel culture, or boycotting, or internet shaming inside and outside of academia. According to Anne Charity Hudley: "'Canceling is a way to acknowledge that you don't have to have the power to change structural inequality. [. . .] But as an individual, you can still have power beyond measure.' The internet heightens that power by collectively amplifying the voices of marginalized people who may be a minority — and otherwise silenced — in their physical communities" (Dudenhoefer 2020). Yet the same efficiency has also amplified older forms of shaming to alarming levels, from bullying to "slut-shaming," "fat-shaming" and the like, with devastating consequences ranging from loss of self-esteem to suicide. The varieties of contemporary shaming are legion, but one thing is certain: despite former claims to the contrary, shame is very much alive and well, and the Covid-19 pandemic has served as a magnifying glass for assessing the amplitude of the phenomenon.

In order to address such conundrums, it might be useful to pay more attention to the overlooked connection between compromise and shame. It is significant that the refusal to compromise and the revived effectiveness of public shaming go hand in hand with the increased polarization of public life. The key to understanding these new developments might be hiding in plain view. For, inside

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1 I borrow this expression from the classic book by James C. Scott (1985). See also 1 Corinthians 1:27: "God chose the weak of the world to shame (*kataischynē*) the strong."

the ongoing debates about the proper way to understand and cope with compromise and shame, there are at least two major points of agreement. First, that both are intimately related to the self (Leary and Tangney 2012). Second, that both have two components, described alternatively as "objective and subjective," "external and internal," "private and public," etc., a dualism that seems reflected in the fact that compromise has both a commendatory and a condemnatory meaning, and most languages have two or more different words for shame. In Hebrew, it is *ḳə·lim·māh* and *bō·šə·nū*; in Greek, *aidṓs* and *aisckhunē*; in Latin, *pudor, infamia,* etc.; in French, *pudeur* and *honte*; in Italian, *vergogna* and *onta*, in Spanish *pudor* and *vergüenza*, in German, *Scham* and *Schande*, etc. Both aspects speak directly, or so I claim, to the largely forgotten dialectic that for centuries has informed the understanding of the self – or of the soul, as it used to be called.

Today, we are used to thinking about the self as either (neo)liberal and highly individualistic or as communitarian and embedded, but one-dimensional, nevertheless. Let's call this the "either-or approach." However, in the medieval understanding, the self of each individual was composed of two fora dependent on each other, constituting each other. *Forum internum* – the inner self – was the forum of authenticity, uniqueness, and complete freedom. No one could regulate or control the *forum internum*, not even the Church. On the other hand, in *forum externum* – the outer self – one was an "I" insofar as one shared in the membership of various communities/*universitates* and one played by the rules and the hierarchies of the community. This was the forum of sameness and conformity. In other words, one was an "I" because one was at once unique and the same as everyone else. Let's call this the "both approach." One had an *identity* insofar as one was *identical* to everyone else, and one was *identical* to everyone else because one had a unique *identity.* The common etymological root of the two words is no accident. The subtle dialectic between the inner and the outer self ensured that both the uniqueness and the sameness (belonging) of the individual were secured. A quote from Sanhedrin IV, 5 captures this dialectic well: "For if a man strikes many coins from one mold, they all resemble one another, but the Supreme King of Kings, the Holy One, blessed be he, fashioned every man in the stamp of the first man, yet not one resembles his fellow. Therefore, every single person is obliged to say: the world is created for my sake" (Delsol 2006: 98).

In this rather sophisticated *Weltanschauung*, the individual could compromise and be represented only as a member of a community. Hence, both representation and compromise involved strictly one side of the self – the outer one. No one could represent an individual "in full," for no one could represent an individual's uniqueness or be virtuous in their place, thus only communities (or offices) could have been represented. The neutral attitude toward compromise was related to the self-representation of the individual – since one's inner self could

never have been represented, it could not have been compromised either, so the uniqueness of the individual was safe. It is worth remembering that even today "compromise" is used with negative connotations when it is perceived, rightfully or not, as endangering or damaging one's unique identity: "I won't compromise my honor, myself, my virtue, etc."

3 Soul and Identity Politics

The relationship between the understanding of the self/soul and politics is not to be ignored, since for millennia, the belief that the proper ordering of the soul is reflected in the ordering of the political life went largely unchallenged. Thus, the relationship between the soul-type and the constitution of the polity was considered of the highest importance. Recall Plato's *Republic* – but also the late medieval al-Farabi's *Political Regime.*[2] Nowadays, this relationship has been replaced and mirrored by the explosion of identity politics. Again, this cannot be a coincidence since the usages and understandings of both compromise and shame are directly related to the identity problem – an identity that nowadays stands on very shaky foundations both at individual and collective levels, primarily because of the digital revolution mentioned before. Or an unsecure identity is one that always feels under threat and thus makes one willing to protect it at all costs. As we have witnessed in recent years, the combination of the increased demands for horizontal equality, the refusal of any authority, i.e., of the vertical dimension, and this unsecure identity is an explosive one, unfortunately not only metaphorically, but sometimes even literally.

One has to remember that compromise presupposes the equality of the parties involved, at least as much as the issue in dispute is concerned. Compromise is not an option when both the representatives and the represented perceive – justified or not – that their identity as a group, that is, the values or principles that define 'them,' are being threatened. Only then is the first prerequisite of any compromise, namely equality, no longer possible, for the distance between 'us' and 'them' is unbridgeable. Why are compromises almost always impossible in cases of identity conflicts? Because compromise means the recognition of the other as equally entitled to their own claims. It confers legitimacy. Yet as long as this identity is apprehended in terms of religion, ethnicity, race, gender or the like, i.e.,

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2 See, for example, Plato's *Republic*, Bk. VIII, St. Augustine, *City of God*, Bk. XIX, Ch. 21, or al-Farabi, *The Political Regime*, Part Two.

non-negotiable features, such requirements are impossible to meet. It is the uniqueness that is endangered when engaging with the other, not the sameness.

Notice the paradox: On the one hand, the identity crisis is conducive to an apparently unstoppable fragmentation in narrower and narrower self-identified groups and sub-groups, in which a single feature becomes the only definition of one's identity. On the other hand, there is an apparently unquenchable thirst for equality. The former development is inimical to compromise. The latter is beneficial. Yet identity conflicts are apparently unable to solve this paradox. However, as I will try to show it in more detail shortly, there is hope. How come, for example, that the French-German relationships have long since passed the phase of no compromise? Once the French and the Germans started to perceive themselves as Europeans as well, compromise became possible, not only via political treatises, but also through the general population. Self-identity was therefore no longer threatened. One might be unequal on one level, yet equal on another. And in the dimension in which one feels equal (in this case, as Europeans), one can compromise without being compromised.

If nowadays compromise seems to be a source of shame, this is because shame too is intimately related to the identity question, as well as to the inner and outer self. It has been almost three quarters of a century since Hellen Merrell Lynd wrote in *On Shame and the Search for Identity* that the "search for identity [. . .] is a social as well as an individual problem. The kind of answer one gives to the question Who am I? depends in part upon how one answers the question What is this society – and this world – in which I live?" (Lynd 1958: 14)[3] Today, the absence of a commonly agreed upon answer to the second question is, presumably, the main cause for the fragmentation and subsequent polarization of societies. None of the binders (the constitution, a social or a governmental contract, traditions, shared history, etc.) or symbols (the flag, the national anthem) that had been previously accepted, expressly or tacitly, are still persuasive enough today to hold us together as political communities.

The same classic dialectic of the self can help us better understand the various usages of shame, and the story of Genesis can serve as a good starting point.[4] In the most influential text for all three major monotheistic religions, Adam and Eve were naked in Eden, but they were *unashamed* (*yiṯ·bō·šā·šū* – inner shame), not having yet tasted from the tree of knowledge of good and evil (*Genesis* 2:25). Only after they bit from its fruit and *knew* the distinction between the two ("the

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3 See Lynd 1958: 14. For the insistence that "individuation is rooted in community" and "the social nexus itself is the womb of the individual" see also Schneider 1977, *Privacy*: xxi–xxii.
4 Some of the following paragraphs are informed by Fumurescu 2023: 432–443.

eyes of both of them were opened and they *knew* they were naked") did they cover themselves, presumably because they were now *ashamed* (*Genesis* 3:7). Being naked was wrong *for themselves*, regardless of any external standard, since God was not yet in the picture. Their knowledge, however, remained partial, thus *doubtful*, for they never got to finish the fruit.

When "they heard the voice of the Lord God," Adam and Eve realized that by covering their "shameful parts" they had revealed yet another, presumably more important shortcoming, so now they hid *entirely* from the presence of God. "The shame before God seems to be different from the shame before each other. Before each other, man and woman hide only their genitalia. Before God, they seek to hide themselves completely" (Kass 2003: 91).[5] Why? Because, as Adam confessed, they were afraid of being naked. What are the consequences of this fear, besides the urge to hide? Adam passes the responsibility onto Eve, and Eve onto the serpent, and they are punished by God in the reverse order – first the serpent, then Eve, and, in the end, Adam (*Genesis* 3:11–19).

This short story captures well the distinction between being *ashamed* and feeling *shamed*. On the one hand, being *ashamed* presupposes the *knowledge* of what is morally wrong *for oneself*. (God does not tell Adam and Eve that it is wrong to be naked – they *know*.) It is an *internalized* feeling, and it implies *accepting responsibility*, followed by an attempt to redress the perceived wrong (in this case, cover oneself, if only with fig leaves). On the other hand, feeling *shamed* is the result of an *external* act, performed by someone else (God, in this instance), for failing to act according to an *external* value system, and comes paired with the feeling of fear, the impulse to hide, *to get out of sight*, and the attempt to *pass the responsibility*. In other words, being ashamed is an *active* feeling, while feeling shamed is a *passive* one, unless the recipient of shaming also feels ashamed as a result, as presumably Adam and Eve did.

Yet before we go any further, we should pause and try to solve a puzzle. The attentive reader will notice that they could not be afraid of being naked, as Adam claims, for they were already covered with aprons made from fig leaves (*Genesis* 3:21). Two possible interpretations come to mind. According to the first, the artificial, man-made aprons were not enough to actually cover their shameful parts, and God provides them with a better cover. As the theological explanation goes (Fumurescu 2023), Adam and Eve acquired physical bodies only after God clothes them with "garments of skin" (*Genesis* 3:21). Thus, in the first instance, it was their souls that were naked for God to see their sin. But this also means that the outer, affective shame (from *k-l-m* or from *h-r-p)*, the one stirred up by an exter-

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5 Kass goes on to make the parallel between this episode and the two Greek words for shame.

nal cause (society, God, etc.), might be more efficient in some instances and more "natural" than the "artificial" one of the inner, cognitive shame.

It has been noted that "the first founder of a city was the first murderer, and his descendants were the first inventors of arts. Not the city, not civilization, but the desert is the place in which the biblical God reveals Himself. Not the farmer Cain, but the shepherd Abel finds favor in the eyes of the biblical God" (Strauss 1952: 109). Is it not possible however, that we are presented with oftentimes real but unnecessary oppositions? Aristotle, for example, argues in his *Politics* that even though the *polis* is, chronologically speaking, the final product of a development that starts with man and woman coming together for the sake of reproduction and the creation of households, and continues with the emergence of villages from a combination of households, the city-state is still prior in nature to the household and even to each of us individually, since the whole is always prior to its parts (Aristotle, *Politics* I, 1253a19). If so, would it not be more plausible that not only the natural and artificial, but also both types of shame are still distinct while all being necessary to human nature?

Considering the classic dialectic between the inner and the outer self, one can see how being ashamed involves the former, while being shamed the latter. One is *ashamed* in one's inner self when one fails the value system one believes in, and one is *shamed* in one's outer self when one fails to comply with an external value system. Since the two fora are interrelated and constitutive of each other, and since they are both parts of one's self, it goes without saying that the distinction between being ashamed and feeling shamed is not an easy one. In traditional societies, the confusion is further amplified by the fact that the external and the internal value systems largely coincide, so one usually feels ashamed for being shamed, which makes shaming such a powerful motivator. Nevertheless, the forgotten dialectic of the self can bring some order in this apparent linguistic, conceptual, and emotional chaos.

After this episode, an apparent oddity occurs in the Hebrew Bible: The word 'shame' in either form is nowhere to be found again in the Bible until the *Book of Numbers*. Even in obviously shameful situations, the very word 'shame' is surprisingly absent. However, *after* the Jewish people enter the Promised Land, the usage of shame, as both *k-l-m* (outer) and *b-w-sh* (inner shame), applied to both individuals and to communities, explodes, with some 167 occurrences of varieties of the inner shame *b-w-sh* (99 only in *Prophets* and 42 in *Psalms*) and 69 occurrences of varieties of outer shame *k-l-m* (39 in *Prophets* and 13 in *Psalms*) (Stiebert

2000: 255–275).[6] The explanation of this oddity, I claim, is related to the lack of a settled identity.

One must remember that the antediluvian period is a pre-legal one, while the Noahide law that follows it is a universal one. The first covenant after the Flood is unconditional and involves the whole human race. And before the Lord promises Abraham that he will father a great nation, Abraham is just a refugee, "a man without a home, without a city, without roots, and without the gods of his place of origins" (Kass 2003: 241). It appears, therefore, that where there is no settled identity, there is no shame either. Since the Israelite people is a covenantal people, 'the true establishment of Israel as a distinctive people must await', until God keeps his side of the agreement, by delivering them the land of Canaan, promised to the seed of Abraham (Kass 2003: 247).

If one agrees that compromise and shame illuminate the bridge between the inner and the outer self, and between an individual's and society's value systems, then the education of the soul becomes crucially important. Obviously, a self-confident soul, the soul who "knows" beyond any doubt and works with moral and/or ethical certitudes, would neither be willing to compromise nor can be ashamed. On the other hand, an individual or a group that lacks any identity will be willing to compromise about anything and be subject to the devastating effects of external shaming. Lacking a stable inner self, the only authority acknowledged is the authority of numbers. To quote Alexis de Tocqueville: "One can reckon that the majority of men will always stop in one of these two states: they will either believe without knowing why, or not know precisely what one must believe" (de Tocqueville 2002: 179). In a similar vein, another Frenchman, Alain Finkielkraut noted with sadness: "The life of mind has quickly moved out of the way, making room for the terrible and pathetic encounter of the fanatic and the zombie" (Finkielkraut 1995: 135).

4 Democratizing the Tyrannical Soul

The main characteristic of the tyrannical soul is precisely the absence of doubt. In Book I of the Platonic dialogue *Republic*, Thrasymachus spells it out: "I do not think it, by Zeus, I know it!" (Plato 1989, *Republic* 345d). But there is hope. One cannot shame someone who "knows," but one can shake the fake beliefs (*doxa*) of one's interlocutor, like Socrates proceeded with Thrasymachus. Naturally, Socrat-

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6 Stiebert is in turn quoting Klopfenstein, *Scham und Schande nach dem Alten Testament* (Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments), 29, 118.

es's cross-examination (*élenkhos*) implies shaming – the famous Socratic irony, of which Thrasymachus complained (Plato 1989, *Republic* 337a). But as the dialog progressed, the famous Sophist began to reluctantly agree with Socrates's arguments and started sweating. "And then," confesses Socrates, "I saw something I had never seen before—Thrasymachus *blushing*" (Plato 1989, *Republic* 350d – my emphasis). After being shamed, the formerly unashamed and confident interlocutor stopped roaring "like a wild beast" (Plato 1989, *Republic* 336b), and became gentle, ceasing to be difficult, and graciously accepted the defeat (Plato 1989, *Republic* 354a). The beast was tamed through respectful shaming.[7]

There is hope, then, that given enough time and the right form of education, even the tyrannical soul can be made to doubt its certitudes, without falling into the trap of complete relativism. In other words, it can (re)become democratic. Thus, if liberal education is not satisfied with merely transmitting information, it should aim to educate the soul on how to navigate between the Scylla of unnegotiable certitudes and the Charybdis of complete relativism, between the fanatic and the zombie, to use Finkielkraut's imagery. It is in this place between the two extremes that politics, properly speaking, finds its place. We must remember that while Adam and Eve bit from the fruit of knowledge of good and evil, they never got to finish it.

From antiquity all the way through modernity, the idea that a republic cannot survive without a shared *ethos*, which in turn demands a certain education of the souls, went largely undisputed. In Steven Smith's words, "an ethos provides the moral horizon within which we live and act. It is the character-based habits and dispositions that constitute a society's way of life [. . .] The ethos of a person or a community designates those characteristics or habits that define a settled manner of behavior" (Smith 2021: 160). But today it is becoming increasingly difficult to even define such a common *ethos*, considering the widening gap between different camps with different ethical certitudes. There is a reason why the education of politics is related with the politics of education.

When on July 22, 1850, Henry Clay rose in the Senate to claim that the Constitution of the United States was the "greatest of all compromises [. . .] a great, memorable, magnificent compromise, which indicates to us the course of duty when differences arise," (Knupfer 1991: 23) no one denied it. By the time of Clay's speech, the idea that the Constitution was a great compromise had already been well embedded in the minds of Americans. This was not an accident but the result of the deliberate implementation of a particular set of education policies. For decades, politicians and civic educators alike worked diligently to reinforce the idea

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7 I borrow this expression from Tarnopolsky 2010*.*

that the Union would not have been possible – and could not be maintained – in the absence of this spirit of compromise. When, for example, Jefferson wanted to convince the reluctant Alexander Hamilton to establish the federal capital on the Potomac River (Washington, D. C.), he invited him over thinking "it is impossible that reasonable men, consulting together coolly, could fail, by some mutual sacrifices of opinion, to form a compromise which was to save the union" (Knupfer 1991: 177).

Half a century later, President John Tyler, too, argued that the Union "should be fostered and sustained by mutual concessions and the cultivation of that spirit of compromise from which the Constitution itself proceeded" (Knupfer 1991: 115). His sentiments were echoed by James K. Polk who, at his inauguration in 1845, also declared that in order to preserve the Union, "the compromises which alone enabled our fathers to form a common constitution [. . .] must be sacredly and religiously observed. Any attempt to disturb or destroy these compromises, being terms of the compact of union, can lead to none other than the most ruinous and disastrous consequences" (Knupfer 1991: 177). These are only a few examples from literally hundreds of appeals to the Union as commendable compromise.[8]

Since the Union was a compromise, and a compromise requires both a contractarian, a rational *and* an affective component having one at the expense of the other would not have been enough. "Blaise Pascal [. . .] believed that knowing is a matter of both reason and faith. Reason alone is not enough" (Smith 2021: 160). This was not a single-man job, nor a single-pronged approach. Emily Pears, for example, identifies three strategies deployed during that time: the utilitarian, the participatory, and the cultural. Although she differentiates between nationalism and political attachments, according to her interpretation, Tocqueville's "rational patriotism" (Pears 2017: 1–29) would fall in the participatory category. "It may be an easy thing to make a republic, but it is a very laborious thing to make republicans," the common-school reformer Horace Mann remarked. "In America, good citizens had to be made; they were not born to the role" (Knupfer 1991: 60). These citizens needed ideals, myths, and even idols. One of the most important steps, if not the first, was raising the Constitution onto a pedestal of respect in American political culture paralleled probably only by the Declaration of Independence. As Judge Addison put it in 1791, "[m]an must have an idol. And our political idol ought to be our Constitution and laws. They, like the ark of the covenant among the Jews, ought to be sacred from all prophane touch" (Schlechter 1915: 733). Politicians and civic educators alike complied willingly with this duty (Fumurescu 2019: 183–184).

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8 For these and other examples, see Fumurescu 2019, ch. 6, especially 176–177.

Many contemporary political theorists have argued, and rightfully so, that democratic states ought to educate the youth in critical thinking in such a way that they will become independent-minded citizens prepared to engage with and challenge any form of authority, much like Socrates did in Athens.[9] But even if we leave aside the question of how many "Socrateses" are among us, before we start educating future generations, we better make sure we actually understand *what* Socrates did in Athens (Fumurescu 2023).

During his trial, Socrates repeatedly pointed out that his accusers were unashamed (*anaiskhuntia*) (e.g., Plato 1989, *Apology* 17b, 31b, 38b), caring to acquire wealth, reputation, and honor, while failing to care for the improvement of their souls. They were unashamed because they cared only for the appearance of shamelessness (*anaides*), not for their true selves (Plato 1989, *Apology* 29d). At the same time, Socrates acknowledged that he himself was unashamed of telling the truth that needed to be told (Plato 1989, *Apology* 22b), namely that people who have the reputation of wisdom are not wise, and neither are those that engage in an occupation that puts them at risk of death (Plato 1989, *Apology* 28b). So, what is the difference? The difference is one between believing one knows and knowing one does not know, between unquestionable convictions and reasonable doubt. Paradoxically, at first sight, the allegedly democratic Athenians acted tyrannically against Socrates, convinced of their ethical high ground, while the accused tried to keep open the necessary space for doubt, and thus for democratic debates. As Euben has noticed: "It is he, not they, who is the true patriot and true Athenian" (Euben 1997: 33).

Precisely because he knew he was not the keeper of any ultimate truth, he performed all his citizen duties faithfully, from going to war, to serving as an *epistates*, showing up in court for trial, accepting the verdict, etc. He did not want to "stand out" for the sake of shocking his audience – like Diogenes the Cynic ("a Socrates gone mad," according to Plato), the darling of the Athenian public would do. He did not masturbate in public, when invited to parties he did not spit in the host's face, he did not live in a barrel, etc. He went even further, saying, "I have the *utmost respect and affection* for you, men of Athens," even though, he would "obey the god" rather than his fellow citizens in cases of disagreement (Plato 1989, *Apology* 29d, emphasis added). As demonstrated in *Crito*, such a declaration was neither irony nor window-dressing for the sake of convenience. Socrates respected his concitizens, despite their shortcomings, because he respected his self in both fora – the inner and the outer. He acknowledged that his outer self at least was the "product" of Athens. It would have been a shame to respond to in-

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9 See, for example, Gutmann 1999; Villa 2001.

justice with injustice, endangering the city by disrespecting its laws (Plato 1989, *Crito* 50b). Yet in equal measure, he was also faithful to his inner self and to the god that informed it, so he followed his inner calling with the risk of his life.[10] It was the respectful Socrates who was put to death in a democracy, not the outrageous Diogenes.

Does this mean that liberal democracies are doomed, as many scholars of late have argued? I dare hope not. The reason for my hope rests on democracy's own weakness. In contemporary liberal democracies, people might not believe in (or even despise) society's *ethos* – as did Diogenes. They might act shamelessly while also trying to shame others – as Diogenes proudly acted. They might cherish their independence of mind and their free spirits, while accusing others of hypocrisy – much like Diogenes did. But Diogenes, too, had his weakness: despite appearances, he had an unquenchable thirst for fame.

Most favorable accounts have it that he misunderstood the Oracle of Delphi when told that he could "change the civic currency." Being young, goes the excuse, Diogenes thought god gave him permission to alter the actual coinage, while the real meaning was to alter the *political* currency by challenging the status quo. The other, more plausible version of the same event is rather conveniently ignored. According to the second account, he "went to Delphi to inquire not whether he should restamp the coinage, but what he should do to become surpassingly famous" (Laertius 2020, *Lives* 6:21).

While most people thought Diogenes's actions proved that he was not the least bit interested in public opinion, Plato saw in his outrageous behavior nothing more than vanity turned upside down. "How much vanity you expose, Diogenes, by not appearing to be vain!" (Laertius 2020, *Lives* 6:26). He was willing to do what it took in order to remain the focus of attention, from copulating in public to babbling if serious talk did not attract the expected audience (Laertius 2020, *Lives* 6:27). It worked. He was admired by many Athenians who presented him with a new tub when the one he lived in was broken by a boy. The boy, on the other hand, was severely punished (*Lives* 6:43). It seems, therefore, that despite his appearance, or precisely because of it, Diogenes did care, after all, about his outer self quite a lot and knew how to attract attention.

One may go as far as to say that Diogenes was the precursor of social media's new stars (Fumurescu 2023). One does not get to be a media darling by "minding one's business," like Socrates did. And while some of these acclaimed media stars may use their fame to draw attention to some of society's failures, most want to

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[10] Twice, during the dialog (49b, 52c), when Socrates argues that replying with injustice to injustice would be shameful and threatening for the city, he uses derivatives of *aisckhunē*.

be in the spotlight for the sake of being in the spotlight. The new media is undoubtedly amplifying this hunting for attention by making it easier. Such wannabe media stars are on the lookout to increase the number of "followers" and "likes" by all means necessary, and some of their exploits would probably make Diogenes look like a boring *petit-bourgeois*. Yet the same "virtual shamelessness" goes hand in hand with the devastating effects of internet shaming, varying from loss of self-esteem to medical depression and suicide.

It might be tempting to blame many of the contemporary challenges on these outer, empty-selves, "shell-selves" unable to find a stable identity except on the outside, be this a fickle public opinion or characteristics over which one has no choice and thus no merit. But this would be to miss the opportunity created precisely by the weakness present in the penchant for public admiration. One has to remember that the only way of reaching someone's inner self, over which no one else has control, is via the outer. By using external shaming (*aidős*), Socrates manages to make Thrasymachus ashamed (*aischunē*) of his previous certitudes. It has been noted that shame is found at the intersection of affections with reason – that is why people as different in time and interests as, say, Epictetus and Charles Darwin could agree that human beings are the only animals that can feel shame and, therefore, blush. If so, the increased influenceability of the contemporary outer self can be used to strengthen the inner one.

This is not a revolutionary idea. As people will always want public admiration, educators who know about the soul should redirect these energies by changing the object of popular admiration, which is usually, but not necessarily, money. From Jean-Jacques Rousseau and David Hume to the American Founders praising what they called "the natural aristocracy" or "the aristocracy of merit," it has been said that the "love of fame" can be "the ruling passion of the noblest minds" (Carey and McClellan 2001: 71) and that "the object of public admiration will invariably be the object of wishes of individuals, and if one has to be rich in order to shine then being rich will always be the dominant passion" (Rousseau 1997: 188). Therefore, the challenge of education is to redirect public respect and admiration to the right objects. If throughout the Founding era political compromises were admired and respected for their ability to sacrifice partial interests for the sake of the common good, it was because the public was deliberately educated to perceive them as such. The unwillingness to compromise was shameful, according to the accepted *ethos*. Such education requires a collective effort. In Benjamin Rush's words, "private virtue requires a collective effort to cultivate" (Lynerd 2014: 188).

It seems, therefore, that by using the right methods, the weakness of the outer self can be employed to strengthen the inner one, by redirecting its aspirations upwards. If there are any worries that moving on a vertical, upwards-

downwards dimension is inherently anti-egalitarian and therefore anti-democratic and inimical to compromise, one of Alexis de Tocqueville's observations should put these to rest:

> There is in fact a manly and legitimate *passion for equality* that spurs all men to wish to be strong and *esteemed*. This passion tends to elevate the lesser to the rank of the greater. But one also finds in the human heart a *depraved taste for equality*, which impels the weak to want to bring the strong down to their level, and which reduces men to preferring equality in servitude to inequality in freedom. (de Tocqueville 2002: 52, emphasis added)

If so, the question becomes: What equality do we want to cultivate in the youth? The answer might be crucial for recovering a healthy willingness to compromise. The very dependence on social media and the widespread fascination with public opinion may turn out to be a blessing in disguise *if* politicians and educators alike can rise to the challenge of educating democratic selves – selves with a reliable inner moral compass, yet remaining mindful of the fact that none of us has managed to finish the fruit of knowledge of good and evil.

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